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FROM THE COEUR D'ALENE PRESS

Panel suggests District 271 cuts

Posted: Monday, Dec 08, 2008 - 11:12:38 pm PST

Email this story Printer friendly version By MAUREEN DOLAN

Staff writer

Group was created after voters rejected \$31 million facilities levy

COEUR d'ALENE -- A financial advisory panel set up last summer to review District 271's budget and fiscal practices unveiled a list of recommendations panel members feel could save the school district millions of dollars.

Trustees and Superintendent Hazel Bauman heard the panel's recommendations at a special board meeting Monday.

"We had a single focus and that was to recommend ways for the district to reduce expenditures knowing what this district is facing regarding financial shortfalls," said Jim Keizer. "We made no allowances for any political consequences, none. We were objective. We had no vested interests in any way to favor any specific program, position or past practice in the school district."

Keizer said it is the panel's hope that its recommendations all be seriously considered for action.

The recommendations were not given in any kind of order. No priority was assigned to any one suggestion.

The first recommendation, presented by Jim Ballew, was to eliminate the International Baccalaureate program at both high schools and reassign the teachers.

"Unfortunately, our analysis shows we are not getting much of anything out of the IB program financially and reward-wise for the students," Ballew said. "We're not happy as a panel with what we're deriving from the IB."

Ballew presented data from the district highlighting that IB classes have been under-enrolled at both Coeur d'Alene High School and Lake City High School.

The cost of the program will exceed \$100,000 this year, he said, although less than 50 students have qualified for any kind of college credit based on the work they have done in IB classes.

The panel's recommendation is to phase out the IB program at both schools by June and reinstate Advanced Placement (AP) so it is available by September 2009.

The panel recommended the hiring of an outside consultant to complete an intensive audit of the district's special education programs and funding.

Jim Keizer said the focus would be on the IEPs, or Individualized Education Plans, mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Education Act, specifically, how they are developed and managed.

He said they would like this consultant to examine how funds can be saved without violating existing IEPs.

Other items presented for consideration include instituting an extracurricular activity fee program. The panel recommended ways to reduce the number of classroom aides and the number of principals and vice principals.

It suggested smaller schools could share administrators, something Keizer said is a common practice in districts facing fiscal challenges.

Under the panel's recommendations, all central office staff positions would be evaluated and at least one position would be eliminated.

There would not be an athletic director at each high school, but rather, one Director of District Extracurricular Activities, who would coordinate and evaluate all those programs.

Field trips would be eliminated unless they are "mission critical."

"We feel that many field trips are nice to do, but are not critical to the core learning experience," Keizer said.

The panel recommended an immediate freeze and evaluation of all staff development contracts, including the \$96,000 per year leadership academy contract entered into by the district last summer.

Panel member Wendell Wardell gave the panel's recommendations to restructure employee health benefits eliminating full benefits for employees who do not work full time and removing life insurance.

He said the panel understands these suggestions and others would need to be negotiated with the Coeur d'Alene Education Association that represents teachers and classified staff.

Wardell said the district needs to create incentives to encourage staff to conserve sick and leave time.

"Your kids have a higher attendance rate than your staff does," Wardell said.

He commended the district's transportation director, Jill Hill, but said there are many miles not being funded by the state because the district has buses that are not on the state's depreciation schedule.

The panel suggested the district consider selling the buses and contract services to provide buses.

He said that could be done while protecting the bus drivers' jobs.

The panel recommended the district sell vacant property it can't use like Persons Field.

It also suggested instituting a hiring freeze and eliminating any positions that are not funded by the state, especially if they are funded through supplemental levies.

"We strongly recommend that everything you do be set up in two columns, nice to have and got to have," Wardell said. "The got to have is what you've got to have to meet the state requirements and get our kids well educated. The nice to have is the frosting."

Wardell strongly suggested the district do everything possible so it is not so dependent on those levies to fund maintenance and operations of the district.

The panel suggested the district continue exploring the feasibility of a four-day school week as a cost-saving measure.

It also recommended the district set up a central purchasing system.

"This is just the beginning of the process. We are going to examine each one of your recommendations, plus some others that we have ourselves," Bauman said.

A second public workshop regarding the district's budget will likely be scheduled in January.

The financial advisory panel was set up by Bauman last summer after voters failed to approve a \$31 million facilities levy in May.

Panel members include:

Wardell, who served three years on the Billings, Mont., school board. A retired CEO, he is currently the business manager of the Kootenai-Shoshone Area Libraries.

Keizer, also retired, a former teacher, principal and school superintendent in California.

Tony Talbot retired U.S. Forest Service budget and finance officer.

Art Flagan, CPA and retired CFO of the Hagadone Corporation.

NIC trustees address lawmakers

Posted: Monday, Dec 08, 2008 - 11:12:41 pm PST

By MAUREEN DOLAN

Staff writer

JEROME A. POLLOS/Press

Reps. Jim Hammond, R-Post Falls, left, and Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, listen to a discussion about North Idaho College's needs during a legislative reception Monday.

College seeks dental hygiene funds, high school enrollment support

COEUR d'ALENE -- North Idaho College trustees and administrators laid out for local lawmakers Monday the items they are eying for state funding and support for January's legislative session.

The college hosted a reception on campus attended by five of more than a dozen area legislators invited.

Priorities on NIC's legislative agenda include funding for the creation of a campus dental hygiene/dental assisting program; funding to assist high school students concurrently enrolled in local colleges; continued support for professional-technical education; funds for classroom technology upgrades; funding to remodel Seiter Hall and support for a revision to Idaho code that would provide more college faculty and staff access to benefits through PERSI (Public Employee Retirement System of Idaho).

NIC Health Professions and Nursing Director Lita Burns told legislators there is a demand for dental hygienists in the area.

"I'm very interested in this particular curriculum, dental hygiene," Rep. Frank Henderson said.

Henderson questioned whether NIC has sought funding from alternate sources like grants and possible assistance from the American Dental Association.

He encouraged the college to set up a task force to seek outside assistance before expecting state funding.

"These are all the factors that the state of Idaho will be looking to see how much NIC is ready to help themselves," Henderson said.

The college supports the Idaho State Board of Education's request for funds to help high school students pay for dual credits on college campuses.

Trustee Mic Armon said providing professional-technical education will continue to be an important factor in NIC's role in serving the community.

He said the college's request is for legislators to support increased state allocations for professional-technical education programs and for support in helping the college continue adding programs.

He mentioned the college's future plan to expand on the Rathdrum Prairie.

"Those are some of the things that we're looking at for professional-technical education. I believe it is the engine that's going to drive this area out of this slow-down economically," Armon said.

Lawmakers heard a request for \$334,000 to bring the classrooms up to minimum technology standards that are easily accessed by instructors.

NIC President Priscilla Bell urged the legislators to support the remodel of Seiter Hall.

Bell said the college has been requesting funds for the building for five years.

Trustee Ron Vieselmeyer said the need to retain faculty and staff through better compensation continues to be an issue, but they would not request funding for this purpose in light of the governor's recent order to hold back 3 percent of funding for state agencies.

Vieselmeyer said that by making it legally possible for newer faculty and staff to access benefits from PERSI, they could make employment at the college more attractive to them.

Legislators: Education funds could be lower in 2010

Posted: Monday, Dec 08, 2008 - 11:12:41 pm PST

Email this story Printer friendly version By TOM GREENE

Staff writer

State stabilization fund should keep programs intact during 2009

COEUR d'ALENE -- Dire economic forecasts have lawmakers considering what would be a first in Idaho history: funding for public education at a level lower than the previous year.

"They might have to take some budget cuts like all the other departments are taking," said Rep. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, who chairs the House Education Committee. "The problem is going to be next year's budget for 2010."

Last month, Gov. Butch Otter ordered all state agencies to cut 3 percent from their budgets and plan for an additional 2 percent in cuts in case they are needed as part of the state's holdback plan to deal with the economic slump.

These cuts are in addition to the 1 percent in cuts across budgets that Otter ordered in September.

Idaho has \$113 million in a Public Education Stabilization Fund that should keep it fully funded for 2009, said Sen. John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene, who chairs the Senate Education Committee.

"If revenues continue to decline, that's not going to be enough," Goedde said. "Idaho has never funded education less than it did the year before and this year it might happen."

Goedde said the Legislature is gearing up to tap into the education fund for \$60 million, leaving \$53 million, which might not be enough to keep up with the state's declining revenue.

Nonini said the fallout for schools will come in fiscal year 2010. He said both education committees in the Legislature will be looking at cutting budgets as well as possibly changing state statutes that make public education funding mandatory.

"So we don't get ourselves into mandatory funding when there's no money," Nonini said.

Former teacher Rep. George Sayler, D-Coeur d'Alene, said he intends to argue against cuts in public education "Although that's probably a losing argument."

"That's why I voted against Risch's (then Gov. Jim Risch) plan," Sayler said. "Because sales tax revenue is less stable than property tax revenue and we're seeing that."

In 2006, Idaho eliminated the public school maintenance and operations levy and replaced the money by boosting the state sales tax to 6 percent from 5 percent.

The bill also put \$100 million into the public education stabilization fund.

In other Legislature news:

House and Senate committee assignments have been finalized with North Idaho lawmakers named to six House committee chair positions and five Senate committee chair positions.

- In the House, Nonini will chair the Education Committee and Rep. Jim Clark, R-Hayden Lake, will chair the Judiciary, Rules and Administration Committee.

Rep. Frank Henderson, R-Post Falls, will serve as vice chair of the Business Committee; Rep. Dick Harwood, St. Maries, will serve as vice chair of the Environment, Energy and Technology Committee; Rep. Eric Anderson, R-Priest Lake will serve as vice chair of the State Affairs Committee; and Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, will serve as vice chair of the Transportation and Defense Committee.

- In the Senate, Goedde will chair the Education Committee.

Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, will serve as vice chair of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee; Sen. Joyce Broadsword, R-Sagle, will serve as vice chair of the Health and Welfare Committee; Sen. Mike Jorgenson, R-Hayden Lake, will serve as vice chair of the Judiciary and Rules Committee; and Sen. Jim Hammond, R-Post Falls, will serve as vice chair of the Transportation Committee.

FROM THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

No new education news stories posted online today.

FROM THE MOSCOW PULLMAN DAILY NEWS (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

OUR VIEW: ISU's Vailas low-balls medical school costs (Editorial)

By Doug Bauer, for the editorial board

Posted on: Monday, December 08, 2008

Arthur Vailas is promising an awful lot for \$21 million.

The Idaho State University president plans to present his vision for a medical degree program in Pocatello to the Idaho State Board of Education next year.

He claims the start-up money would be covered by a loan and allow 60 students to enroll in the program each year, starting in 2012. The students would be trained through existing health science courses their first two years, and spend their final two years doing hands-on work at clinical sites in Idaho.

That sounds like a pretty good deal on the surface.

Dig down a few layers, however, and there are some substantial holes in Vailas' plan.

For starters, it's going to cost a lot more than \$21 million to open and operate a medical school of any sort in this day and age.

That sum is little more than chump change when you consider some of the estimates coming out of the University of California-Riverside, where former University of Idaho President Tim White is trying to get a new medical school off the ground.

The price tag for that enterprise is estimated at a whopping \$507.9 million. To be fair, that figure includes a pair of fancy new buildings and the associated infrastructure and facilities that come along with them.

But it doesn't include an expected \$87 million annual operating budget. That alone is four times greater than Vailas' start-up sum, which could be the tip of the iceberg as far as funding is concerned.

Idaho's economy can't handle its current needs, let alone a multimillion-dollar endeavor that could cost much more in the long run than Vailas' initial estimate.

Idaho doesn't need a bargain-basement medical school in Pocatello. It needs to find the most efficient, cost-effective way to educate doctors to serve the growing needs of its populace.

Dumping money into a pie-in-the-sky medical program when the state and national economies are staggering is neither the best nor most realistic option for Idaho and its taxpayers.

FROM THE LEWISTON TRIBUNE (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Require less busywork, get more teaching (Editorial)

Jim Fisher

Tuesday, December 9, 2008

Some members of this region's higher education faculties may have blanched Sunday upon reading the suggestion that the nation's colleges and universities retard the rise in student costs by increasing teaching loads of their faculties. But there is a way the idea - from a new report on higher education as related in the Lewiston Tribune by Washington Post columnist David Broder - could benefit both students and some faculty members.

That way is to stop imposing the same research publication demands on everyone in the tenure track. By permitting some professors to teach more, and publish less, universities especially could reduce their costs without sacrificing teaching quality.

Wouldn't research suffer? Not necessarily.

The people who are conducting valuable research, who are usually the ones who want to continue doing it, should be encouraged to do so. But for every research star in the university, there are other professors who admit - in private - they are going through the motions, grinding out research papers of questionable quality solely because that is where the faculty reward system is centered.

Some of them could be in fields, like the natural sciences, where others are making significant contributions to human knowledge. But many are in fields whose scholarly publications seem to exist for little purpose other than as a path to promotion.

The agricultural industry, for example, has a keen interest in chemical and biological research that might help it do its job better, but journalists ignore most academic research in their field because it has little to no relevance to what they do. It seems to exist because all professors are required to jump through the same hoops, whether doing so leads to something worthwhile or not.

And because they are, they teach fewer courses than do faculty members at, say, Lewis-Clark State College. Not only is the standard course load per semester lower, but individual faculty members also are given what's called release time to teach even less in order to conduct more research.

The cost of this regime is especially disproportionate in states like Idaho where the higher education system is out of balance. The Gem State has three state-supported universities with research missions, one state-supported college, LCSC, emphasizing teaching and an inadequate, scattered community college network relying on local residents for much of its funding.

Enforcers of the publish-or-perish regime say conducting research is essential to good teaching, but they have little research to back that up. And university graduates know better: Commitment to research does not make someone a poor teacher, but it doesn't guarantee a good one either.

Breaking the rigidity of this regime in institutions that should be among the most flexible in the country won't be done by individual states. It's a national imperative that defies regional interference. If it were attacked on a national level, however, the country might help restrain escalating higher education costs while increasing faculty satisfaction at the same time. - J.F.

FROM THE IDAHO-PRESS TRIBUNE, NAMPA

No new education news stories posted online today.

FROM THE IDAHO STATESMAN

Our View: Pay for more out-of-state med school seats (Editorial)

OUR VIEW MEDICAL EDUCATION

- Idaho Statesman

Edition Date: 12/09/08

Dr. Charles "Fuzzy" Steuart ran an unorthodox medical practice - and not only because he bartered with some patients for payment in deer or elk venison, yard work, or beer or wine.

Steuart was unusual because he decided to set up practice in a desolate outpost in Idaho. He opened a clinic in Arco, partway between Idaho Falls and Craters of the Moon National Monument, where the wind is constant and the population has remained stuck at about 1,000.

Steuart died earlier this fall, leaving his clinic in limbo. His story, chronicled by Corey Taule of the Idaho Falls Post Register and reprinted in Monday's Statesman, illustrates a larger problem in small-town Idaho.

Doctors are scarce. Access to basic, preventive medical care is spotty.

This ought to be the sole focus of Idaho's continuing - and parochial - debate over medical education. How can we improve patient access to doctors, at a price Idaho taxpayers can afford?

Idaho has almost no place to go but up. Its number of physicians per capita ranked No. 49 in the nation in 2006, according to a feasibility study on medical education, completed on behalf of lawmakers by MGT of America Inc.

This doctor shortage afflicts community health care across Idaho. But the medical education issue, like many higher education debates preceding it, pits region against region.

Idaho State University is pushing in-state medical education, saying this would give Idaho more control over curriculum and provide economic spinoff benefits from research. The University of Idaho prefers paying for more seats at established campuses, including the nationally respected University of Washington medical school. Boise State University has also been skeptical of the ISU plan.

Color us skeptical as well. We're convinced Idaho is better served by paying to send more students to existing med schools and enhancing the Idaho residency programs that go a long way toward determining where young doctors set up their practices - and put down community roots.

Securing additional spots in out-of-state medical schools - while offering financial incentives such as loan forgiveness for Idaho residencies - is more practical than a startup medical school. Especially since ISU president Arthur Vailas suggests that it would take a loan to get a medical program up and running.

Considering Idaho's other infrastructure needs, from roads and bridges to existing university facilities and state buildings, we're uneasy about incurring debt for this project.

The worst course of action is to do nothing. Idaho simply cannot afford to make no changes, to continue with the status quo, to leave Arco and any number of other communities dependent on finding remarkable people willing to practice small-town medicine, under unusual circumstances.

The state needs to settle this debate by building on its relationships with existing medical schools - and the sooner, the better.

"Our View" is the editorial position of the Idaho Statesman. It is an unsigned opinion expressing the consensus of the Statesman's editorial board. To comment on an editorial or suggest a topic, e-mail editorial@idahostatesman.com.

FROM THE TWIN FALLS TIMES-NEWS

No new education news stories posted online today.

FROM THE IDAHO STATE JOURNAL (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

ISU interviews new provost candidates

Position has been open since Robert Wharton left in July

BY YANN R ANAIVO
yranaivo@journalnet.com

POCATELLO — Idaho State University has begun the interviewing process for a new provost, an administrative post that has been vacant since former Provost Robert Wharton left in July.

ISU President Arthur Vailas said during an interview last week that he met with one provost candidate during a weeklong trip to Boise.

Ron Hatzenbuehler, the chairman of the provost search committee, said the search group was organized last spring and has invited a number of candidates to the ISU campus for interviews in recent weeks.

Hatzenbuehler did not disclose how many candidates have been interviewed and did not comment on when ISU expects to fill the vacant position.

“We’re in the process of interviewing candidates on campus,” he said. “The search is open until the position is filled.”

Since Wharton left, ISU has charged three associate provosts with carrying out portions of his former duties.

The three associate provosts have assisted with running academic programs, faculty affairs and enrollment.

According to a university spokesman, much of the provost’s duties involves overseeing all of the university’s academic matters, including faculty affairs and student curriculum.

ISU SEEKS NOMINATIONS FOR TEACHER, PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS

POCATELLO — Nominations are sought for the Idaho State University Distinguished Teacher and Distinguished Public Service Awards to be given at the May commencement exercises.

A third faculty member will be chosen by a different process for Distinguished Researcher. The three winners will receive certificates and cash awards at commencement.

Distinguished teacher nominations are based solely on teaching expertise and must be nominated by at least two groups, faculty, staff or alumni. Candidates for the public service award can be nominated by one or more groups from students, faculty, staff or the public. The award is based only on public service activities.

A nominee must be a current member of the ISU faculty in their third or subsequent year of full-time service and planning to continue as a faculty member for 2009 to 2010. Up to five finalists in each category will be honored at a banquet before commencement.

Nominations forms are available from Lisa Jensen and can be returned to her at Office of Academic Affairs, Administration Building Room 264, ISU Stop 8063, Pocatello, Idaho 83209, 282-2362, offices of academic deans, ISU offices in Idaho Falls, Boise and Twin Falls, the Eli M. Oboler Library Information Desk, Pond Student Union and Rendezvous information desks, College of Technology cafeteria in the Roy F. Christensen Building or www.isu.edu/acadaff/awards or e-mail acadvp@isu.edu.

For selecting the distinguished researcher, contact the Office of Research, ISU Stop 8130, Pocatello, Idaho 83209, phone 282-2179.

FROM THE IDAHO FALLS POST REGISTER (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

District 93 bond vote is Wednesday

The district wants \$25 million for a new school and a host of repairs and other improvements.
By SAMANTHA PAK spak@postregister.com

Bonneville Joint School District 93 is asking for a \$25 million bond to build a new school, among other things. On Wednesday, patrons will decide whether they want to pony up.

The big question is whether passage of the bond would mean a tax increase for patrons. Bonneville officials say the bond wouldn't affect the levy rate patrons currently pay. Other factors, such as property values, could affect the levy rate.

But Superintendent Chuck Shackett said that despite the economic downturn, growth in eastern Idaho should allow the district to keep the levy rate flat and even pay the bond off before its 20-year life expires.

The district, Shackett said, hopes to pay it off in 12 to 15 years. He said the district wouldn't be pushing the bond if it believed a tax increase would be the result.

"The worst case for us is we're going to have to stretch it out to 20 years," Shackett said.

About half the money from the bond would go toward a new elementary school that district officials say is needed because of rapid growth in student population.

Some money would be used for improvements throughout the district and the rest would go toward purchasing land for future school sites.

The new school would be 59,000 square feet and hold 600 students. A location hasn't been finalized yet, but Shackett said district officials are looking at land southeast of Woodland Hills

Elementary School because it is currently using three trailers, making it six classrooms over capacity.

District 93 is the seventh largest school district in the state. Currently, 9,547 students are enrolled -- a 4.5 percent increase from last year. The district projects the number to increase by about 1,100 during the next two years, based on projections done by Intermountain Demographics, a Boise-based company.

Mike Sorenson, the district's director of business operations, said Bonneville expects student population to double by 2018, which could lead the district to ask voters to build a new middle school and high school in five years.

The bond election Wednesday will be the fourth time in less than five years the district has asked for more money from taxpayers.

From 2004-07, District 93 asked for a total of \$60.5 million to expand Hillview Elementary School and build two elementary schools, fund educational programs, hire another resource officer and address costs due to increasing enrollment.

Polls will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at all District 93 schools (except Telford Academy).

Cast your vote

Where: any Bonneville Joint School District 93 school (except Telford Academy)

When: polls open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday

What the money would be used for

One new elementary school (\$13,151,000)

Replacing the roofs at Tiebreaker and Ucon elementary schools (\$1,580,000)

Science classroom upgrades in secondary schools (\$300,000)

10 new school buses (\$1,000,000)

Technology projects (\$4,359,000)

Safety and security projects (\$1,810,000)

Purchasing land for future schools (\$2,800,000)

LEGO ROBOT

Legionnaires team creates robot for competition

By CLARK CORBIN ccorbin@postregister.com

Lego Legionnaires engineering club members make final tweaks to their robot Friday night at the Studsvik building in downtown Idaho Falls before they headed to Pocatello on Saturday to compete in a robotics competition - Elliott Hess ehess@postregister.com

There is a world of difference between building Lego kingdoms in your basement and the feats of the Lego Legionnaires.

The Legionnaires, a team of eight 9- to 14-year-olds from Idaho Falls, have spent three months designing, building, programming and testing a Lego robot to compete in a regional robotics and engineering competition.

"For my career, I want to be a robot designer, so I thought maybe this could help me get started," 12-year-old Liam Smith said. "And it's fun hanging with friends and doing something fun instead of school 24/7."

The team's robot uses levers and attachments to perform jobs around its 8-foot by 4-foot Lego city. The projects included constructing a levee, lifting a house, closing a window, picking up computers and scooping three balls into a holding pen.

But here's the catch: The team can't touch the robot once it leaves home base. The team has to rely on sensors and programs the students wrote to guide the robot through its jobs. They didn't even have the luxury of a remote control.

"I've always loved Legos, but I have never used them for so many things," Longfellow Elementary School sixth-grader Bryce Frazee said. "I didn't even know you could do so much with them."

The competition is designed to turn promising young students on to science and engineering and encourage teamwork. Team member Gemma Clark, 11, performed double duty by helping build the robot and designing the team's T-shirts, which featured the clever slogan "Lego Legionnaires, We Come In Pieces!"

The Lego Legionnaires traveled to Idaho State University's Pocatello campus Saturday to compete against 43 other teams from eastern Idaho. They earned 120 points and hung with the top four teams through the first two rounds.

Owen Versteeg, an 11-year-old Sunnyside Elementary School student, said he learned valuable lessons about patience and teamwork during the hundreds of hours of preparation.

"Even when you lose your entire program or your robot doesn't work like you need it to, it's not the end of the world," Owen said. "It might end up better with someone else's ideas."

Features writer Clark Corbin can be reached at 54206761.

School fetches funds

Sunnyside Elementary paying it forward
By CLARK CORBIN ccorbin@postregister.com

Michelle Ball could have spoiled her own class with the \$1,000.

She could have splurged on a computer or movies for her students.

But Ball had bigger plans.

Ball, who teaches a first-, second- and third-grade spectrum class at Sunnyside Elementary School, received a \$1,000 teacher of the year grant from Wal-Mart last month and decided to split the money among the school's classrooms, urging the students to select charities as recipients and "pay it forward."

"When I won the award, I felt like the whole community at this school helped me win it," Ball said. "I felt like it wasn't just my award but the school's award because of that support."

Each class received \$50, and the student council tacked on another \$25 to get the project rolling.

Three classes are supporting the Snake River Animal Shelter, a proposed 8,200-square-foot facility on 12 acres along West River Road near the Idaho Falls Regional Airport.

Sunnyside classrooms staged additional fundraisers to multiply the \$75 each teacher received from Ball's grant.

In addition to helping the animal shelter, Sunnyside students and faculty stretched Ball's grant to support Helping Hands for Veterans, the Senior Citizens Community Center, Newspaper in Education, Friends in Service Here and the Women's Crisis Center.

Students in three classes picked the shelter because they wanted to reduce the number of animals euthanized each year and ease pressure on animal shelters.

"We wanted to help the shelter so that so many animals wouldn't be put to sleep," said first-grader Chase Glenn, who raised additional money for the cause by taking on extra chores at home.

Susan Hulse, the shelter's executive director, said Sunnyside students raised \$1,000 for the shelter and pitched in about \$500 more in toys and food.

About \$250,000 of the required \$2.5 million has been raised for the shelter, Hulse said. That's a big chunk of change, but small steps such as Sunnyside's effort help the Snake River Animal Shelter inch closer to the finish line.

"Our need is huge, but if everybody gives a little, we will make our goal," Hulse said. "Luckily for us, we have a lot of little gifts like this."

An average of 50 animals are put down each week in eastern Idaho, partially because of a lack of shelter space and resources, and the Snake River Animal Shelter estimates it could house and adopt out 2,850 dogs and 2,470 cats annually once the facility is built, Hulse said.

The connection between Sunnyside and the shelter was already firmly rooted because sixth-grade teacher Deidre Therp's dog, Molly, serves as the facility's mascot.

"We want the animals to have a place to go, rather than just running on the street or not having a chance to be adopted," sixth-grader Jack Herget said.